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Senior Health and Wellness Newsletter

Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living



Vitamin D, The Sunshine Vitamin

According to the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, Vitamin D is a nutrient of public health concern for Americans. Vitamin D is a fat soluble vitamin stored in fat tissue. It is both a nutrient we eat and a hormone our bodies make. We make vitamin D when sunlight hits our skin. This is why it is often referred to as the Sunshine Vitamin.

Vitamin D works with Calcium to keep our bones strong as we age. Without these two nutrients we are at greater risk for osteoporosis which results in bone loss and osteomalacia which results in softening of the bones. Both put us at greater risk for fractures. If bones are fragile, even a minor fall can cause fractures. People who get too little vitamin D may develop either or both of these conditions.

In addition to our bone health, Vitamin D plays a role in keeping our immune system strong thus helping us stay healthier.

Vitamin D is also needed for muscles to move and for nerves to carry messages between the brain and other areas of the body.

Recent research indicates that Americans need to get more vitamin D than we once



thought. Older adults and persons with dark skin are at higher risk for having low levels of vitamin D. As we age, our skin doesn't make Vitamin D as efficiently when exposed to sunlight. Therefore, our Vitamin D needs are higher.

Ten to fifteen minutes of sunlight exposure on our hands, arms, and face twice per week will help us get some of the Vitamin D that we need.

The following amounts of Vitamin D are needed from the foods we eat daily.

- Adults ages 51 to 70 should get 600 IU (15 mcg) of Vitamin D daily.
- Adults over 70 years should get 800 IU (20 mcg).

We can get Vitamin D through the following food sources.

- Milk
- Fish such as herring, mackerel, salmon, or tuna
- Fortified cereals.

Check the Nutrition Facts Label to help you find sources of Vitamin D while shopping.



It can be difficult to get enough vitamin D from food sources and sunlight. Therefore, it may be necessary to take a vitamin D supplement.

Caution: Too much Vitamin D can be harmful. Too much Vitamin D almost always occurs from too many supplements. Excessive sun exposure does not cause vitamin D poisoning because the body limits the amount it makes. If you take more than 4,000 IU (100 mcg) per day, you are at risk for overdose which could lead to nausea, vomiting, poor appetite, constipation, weakness, weight loss, and kidney damage.

For more information:

National Institutes of Health Office of Dietary Supplements—
<http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/VitaminD-QuickFacts/>

Dietary Guidelines for Americans—<http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/DGAs2010-PolicyDocument.htm>

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